

Izolda Takács

ORCID: 0000-0002-1877-2848

ELTE Eötvös Loránd University

Women's destinies after the Declaration of Gender Equality. Spaces and opportunities in the shadow of the ideology of the Party in Hungary

Women's destinies after the Declaration of Gender Equality. Spaces and opportunities in the shadow of the ideology of the Party in Hungary

Abstract

The paper is part of a qualitative research project executed in 2017 and 2018, within the scope of which I have recorded semi-structured interviews with 11 female academics and 21 female doctors of science (DSc). I am attempting a comprehensive introduction of how historical changes in the second part of the 20th century affected the women's and science policies, the educational and employment as well as family support system in Hungary, i.e. how the world presenting contradictory ideological and practical conditions due to the interrupted development of the middle class affected the structure of social roles. By quoting certain parts of the interviews, I intend to demonstrate the exact brand new and traditional issues female scientists have/could have faced during the era of state socialism.

Keywords

academic elite, equality, inequalities, ideology, science policy, education, XX. second half of the century

Introduction

In this study, I am attempting a comprehensive introduction of how historical changes in the second part of the 20th century affected the women's and science policies, the educational and employment as well as family support system in Hungary, i.e. how the world presenting contradictory ideological and practical conditions due to the interrupted development of the middle class affected the structure of social roles.

The paper is part of a qualitative research project executed in 2017 and 2018, within the scope of which I have recorded semi-structured interviews with 11 female academics and 21 female doctors of science (DSc). I was primarily aiming to find out if they have encountered any disadvantages that can be traced back to their gender during their scientific career, and whether the fact women are extremely underrepresented to this day in the upper echelons of Hungarian science can be attributed to gender discrimination (the percentage of women among academics and DSc's in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences [Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, referred to henceforth as MTA] is 6.7% and 15.5%, respectively). The 2019 member election changed this ratio to 8.7%.¹

While the members of the analysed population were mainly born between 1940 and 1960, and have typically gained their first academic degrees in the 60's, 70's and 80's, the domestic historical context of the research was state socialism. Though the multi-perspective survey has shown general hindrances rooted in gender differences, especially in leadership roles and with regards to the election process of the Academy, it became clear nonetheless that the interviewed scientists have fundamentally encountered rather difficulties related to the typical political-ideological frame of the second part of the 20th century than those based on gender during the offset of their scientific career. By quoting certain parts of the interviews, I intend to demonstrate the exact brand new and traditional issues female scientists have/could have faced during the era of state socialism.

The fact that state socialism brought profound changes and fundamentally transformed the previous social structure is commonly known. Furthermore, all this was joined with significant changes in worldview and reasoning. The most expressive way to illustrate how impactful the characteristics in mentality introduced in this era where is to point to certain mental conditionings which people could not shed even after the end of socialism.² The results of in-depth interview research done by Mária Neményi show for example that the majority of people socialised during the decades of state socialism could not clearly separate the role of the state and the employer even in the 2000's. Thus, they have attributed certain benefits, such as GYED [child care fee], company nursery or kindergarten etc. even after 2000 to the state.³ The same heritage can also be observed with regards to their relation toward the public sphere and politics.

¹ Cf. V. Lamm, B. Nagy, 2019 *ismét a „nők éve” az Akadémián. Törekvések a nők tudományos pályafutásának támogatására*, „Magyar Tudomány” 2019, 180(11), 1653.

² T. Valuch, *Magyar hétköznapok. Fejezetek a mindennapi élet történetéből a második világháborútól az ezredfordulóig*, Budapest 2013.

³ M. Neményi, *Család és családpolitika*, „Szociológiai Szemle” 2003, 1, 26.

Inspecting the participation in politics in Hungary during the turn of the millennium as well as the characteristics of domestic political activity, certain researchers have found paternalism, a need for a nanny state still has a heavy presence as a heritage of the Kádár-era of sorts. Moreover, the lack of interest towards public matters, social atomisation and the lack of “civil courage” is also present to this day.⁴ All this ingrainedness could remain so apparent and persistent because the ideological and political set of requirements and conditions has existed from 1948 until 1989, and it only changed during all this time insofar as the totalitarian model has adopted a trait in the mid-60's which we could call “weakening authoritarian.”⁵

Rights, responsibilities, tolerations and bans in the shadow of state ideology

The equal political and civil rights of men and women have been codified as fundamental rights and embedded into the Constitution in our country after the 2nd world war (Hungarian Constitution, Act XX of 1949), furthermore, the right of women to education, free choice of career and occupation has also been stated. Article 1 paragraph 66 posits complete legal equality between men and women, i.e. rejects any negative gender discrimination extended to all facets of life: “The Republic of Hungary shall ensure the equality of men and women in all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.”⁶ Thus establishing and providing a unified framework for all those new elements in legal regulation, which led to the equality of women in Hungary from a legal aspect. The Family Act of 1952 (Act IV of 1952) has created legal equality with respect to the role of women in the family, which has presented a fundamentally new approach in family relations. “Socialist marriage is a fellowship built upon the affection between two free and equal people.”⁷ Moreover, the above legal act has declared the equal rights and responsibilities regarding family matters, codified the freedom in the choice of names, stated the joint estate, defined the rights pertaining to divorce, and detailed the equal rights regarding child custody and the right of shared parenting. We can however not forget that the primary goal of the above was to achieve complete control over

⁴ T. Valuch, „Ne szólj szám...”. *A politikai részvétel és a politikai aktivitás néhány sajátossága az ezredforduló Magyarországon*, „Metszetek: Társadalomtudományi Folyóirat” 2013, 2–3, 153.

⁵ T. Valuch, *A magyar művelődés 1948 után*, [in:] L. Kósa (ed.), *Magyar művelődéstörténet*, Budapest 1998, 461.

⁶ 1949. évi XX. törvény – *A Magyar Népköztársaság Alkotmánya*, <http://www.rev.hu/sulinet45/szerviz/dokument/1949.evi3.html> [accessed: 02.05.2020].

⁷ M. Schadt, „Feltörekvő dolgozó nő” – *Nők az ötvenes években*, Pécs 2003, 18.

the family as a legal institution. In any case, by providing the right for women to initiate divorce, the state has made the resolution of family bonds actually easier.⁸

We need to add that simultaneously to providing these rights, the Ministry of the Interior has issued regulations that resulted in abolishing any possibility of civil organisations. As the result of this, the Hungarian Feminist Association existing since 1904, as well as numerous other organisations (civil reading circles and clubs, organisations independent of the state party, charity women's associations, etc.) could not be active until the regime change.⁹ The MNDSZ [Magyar Nők Demokratikus Szövetsége, Hungarian Women's Democratic Alliance] active until 1956, as well as the MNOT [Magyar Nők Országos Tanácsa, National Council of Hungarian Women] reorganised in 1957 and active until 1989 were not independent from the one-party state, as they have exclusively represented the state ideology.

One of the consequences was the diverse western waves of feminism, as well as the ideologies stated therein could not be introduced in Hungary, emblematic writings could not get into the hands of Hungarian readers after 1945. Not to mention these works were not even available in their original languages.

The media and the publishing industry was under the strict control of state censorship, feminism and its history was approached by creating confusion and incomprehension in the public sphere.¹⁰ Thus, to present the history of feminism and feminist notions to the Hungarian public was practically barred in the era of state socialism. In addition to this, the so-called “three T's (PTB)”, i.e. the approach of “promote, tolerate, ban (tiltás, tűrés és támogatás)” in cultural policies has become a typical trait of the state. The set of authors and works declared to be “tolerated” by the censorship has grown at a very slow pace.¹¹

In Hungary back then, If one wanted to read a textbook in foreign language, it could not be done too simply, they were difficult to get. We had not much choice. This has presented a barrier for me multiple times, especially due to my research subject (subject no. 18, social sciences).

Breaking the civil society was needed in the interest of securing the power of the one-party state. One of the tools applied for this purpose was the atomisation and proletarianisation of the populace.¹² Women (as well as men) needed to take

⁸ Cf. *ibidem*.

⁹ J. Acsády, *Államszocializmus – nők – ellenzékiesség*, „Társadalmi Nemek Tudománya Interdiszciplináris eFolyóirat” 2018, 8(1), 1–15, <https://ojs.bibl.u-szeged.hu/index.php/tntef/article/view/33836> [accessed: 07.05.2020].

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 6.

¹¹ T. Valuch, *A magyar művelődés...*, *op. cit.*, 461.

¹² Cf. I. Asztalos-Morell, Asztalos-Morell I., *A mérnökő: Felszabadított nő vagy pártretorikai fegyvelmezőeszköz a személyi kultusz Magyarországon*, „Társadalmi Nemek Tudománya Interdiszci-

significant political-ideological disadvantages into account within the relations of that era in Hungary as well. The dictatorial establishment has created a particular “subjected” relation with regards to the relation of politics and society, which was conjoined by a certain sense of defeat as well after the revolution of 1956. Society thus became even more exposed to political power, and it had an even bigger effect on the attitude of different social groups as well as on the intellectuals.¹³

“Are you a party member?” – was the question at the university. I responded with no, I am not. Why, they ask. “We need people with commitment here, you know” (subject no. 32, natural sciences).

Only people with good political standing could go to conferences or labs abroad back then, this was an issue for me multiple times, it hindered my getting forward. Not everyone liked it if their inferiors used their brain or had different opinions (subject no. 15, natural sciences).

Meaning views different from those of the party could not be articulated on any forums neither during the Rákosi dictatorship, nor past that, during the Kádári-an consolidation period. Therefore, no grassroots initiatives, no voice addressing women's policies or addressing criticism against the regime could not develop in our country. If oppositionary circles, alternative thinkers have entered the public sphere regardless during these tense political periods, they were faced by ramifications. During the so-called Philosopher's Trial of 1973, several people were removed from their academic positions, after which the control of the state party has manifested to an even harsher degree. Multiple philosophers were arrested for possession of “anti-establishment” manuscripts.¹⁴ Similar ideology-based layoffs were however common not only in the 60's and 70's, but in the later periods, up until the end of socialism as well.

I was removed from ELTE [Eötvös Loránd University] in '85, the police visited the head of our department and the dean a few too many times. So they have decided not to extend my contract as an assistant lecturer (subject no. 20, liberal arts).

This virtually meant that an intellectual in Hungary had to completely renounce their right to the freedom of thought and expression in the scientific field.

lináris eFolyóirat” 2018, 2(8), 147, http://epa.oszk.hu/03400/03462/00017/pdf/EPA03462_tarsadalmi_2018_02_140-173.pdf [accessed: 06.07.2020].

¹³ T. Valuch, *A magyar művelődés...*, op. cit.

¹⁴ See, J. Acsády, „Megtettük-e azt, amit az eszményeink szerint meg kellett volna, hogy tegyünk?” *Az államszocializmus demokratikus ellenzékének elmaradt nőemancipáció-reflexióiról*, „Socio.hu: Társadalomtudományi Szemle” 2016, 2, 173–197.

Thus, up until the late 80's, keeping distance from politics, indifference, low level of civic self-consciousness and a negligible extent of empowerment was typical.¹⁵ Which also meant the fundamental rights – as well as the emancipation of women – declared in the Constitution during four decades of state socialism remained *de facto* completely under the shadow of party ideology.

Changes in the situation of women, old and new barriers of success

The social status of women has profoundly changed during state socialism in three areas due to the significant shifts in working, power structure and education. Despite the fact however that the realisation of women's emancipation was part of public awareness on the turn of the 40's and 50's, and the situation regarding women's education was beginning to look favorable, all these changes came with large internal disparities and problems.¹⁶ Because the fundamental background of all these changes was – beside ideological perspectives – the drastic change of economical factors. Meaning the inclusion of women in the labour market was one of the consequences of the aggressive, extensive industrial production which was to be implemented following the soviet model of planned economy.¹⁷ In other words, the democratisation of the educational system could virtually be implemented only because it was defined as one of the instruments of modern workforce training.

Managing the educational institutions system, tutoring – including the tutoring of women – in Hungary has also been subordinated to economic rationalism. The idea of the newly created “ideal woman” following a soviet model, as well as the interests of women during the Rákosi dictatorship both served the purposes of the official ideology and the party bureaucracy. The limits of emancipation have therefore only extended to where they could still serve the socialist ideology.¹⁸ The most important ideological thesis stated that state socialism has to surpass capitalism with its own ability for development.¹⁹ Training the youth to accept the ideology of this state socialist system was primarily in the center of reshaping education. This of course entailed the fundamental need of this new political system to produce a technocratic elite loyal to the communist party.

¹⁵ Cf. T. Valuch, *A magyar művelődés...*, *op. cit.*, 460–490; T. Valuch, „*Ne szólj szám...*”. *A politikai...*, *op. cit.*, 146–156.

¹⁶ Zs. Ferge, *Változik-e manapság a nők helyzete Magyarországon?*, „*Létünk*” 1982, 5, 883–907.

¹⁷ M. Schadt, *Ellentmondásos szerepelvárások, nők az államszocializmusban*, „*Acta Sociologica*” 2005, 1, 61–75.

¹⁸ M. Schadt, „*Feltörekvő dolgozó nő*” ..., *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Cf. I. Asztalos-Morell, *op.cit.*

As it is commonly known, the social culture of Hungary before the 2nd world war was mainly closed, mobility was limited. The so-called “*numerus clausus*”, ie. Act XXV of 1920 controlling the enrollment into higher education was also introduced in the same period, which limited the proportion of jews to be enrolled in universities, the polytechnic, economic and law schools. This resulted in an increased chance for urban bourgeois, gentry and other so-called “christian genteel middle-class” groups to achieve higher education and start a white-collar career.²⁰ We need to add the concept of gentility was also in transition at that point in time.

As Kövér, Gyáni highlighted, gentility could not be achieved only by simply birthright or profession at that time. But a strict principle of selection was in effect regardless, which was not completely expressed by the system of titles and estates. More precisely, the concept of gentility has been autonomically dictated by the practice of social interactions by reserving the status of “gentleman” to those belonging to the society either formally or – and especially – informally. These “gentlemen” could reach all statuses through these *non-market routes* jews had to secure for themselves through market achievements, if they received sufficient acknowledgment at all.²¹

This social and educational system has been profoundly transformed by the communist, state socialist system after 1945. First, the materialistic system governing enrollment was substituted by the “cadre approach”, and second, the most competent candidates were selected from the working class and poor peasants for various vocational and rapid training courses and to fulfill the role of the new white-collar class.²² The class composition and political loyalty was controlled by those entering traditional higher education as well. The aim of this control was to secure the training of intellectuals loyal to the party in these educational avenues. Places were reserved in universities for those deemed politically appropriate either by their descent or reference to their membership in the party. An intellectual descent was therefore unfavorable in terms of further education due to political-ideological reasons.

I started with a disadvantage due to my white-collar heritage. Because when two students achieved the same score on the matriculation, the one enrolling was the »m-kind«, the offspring of a working class family, not the white-collar child (subject no. 24, social sciences).

²⁰ P. Faragó, *Nők a tudományban. A tudós nők helyzete Magyarországon a 20. században*, [in:] M. Balogh, S. Nagy Katalin (eds.), *Asszonyorsok a 20. században*, Budapest 2000, 25–33.

²¹ G. Kövér, G. Gyáni, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a reformkortól a második világháborúig*, Budapest 2006, 271.

²² P. Faragó, *op. cit.*, 27.

Students from middle class families could only get into higher education institutions if they had a flawless scholastic record, to the places left open by the aforementioned.²³ The result of this however opened up opportunities for higher education to the lower strata of the society as well as to women. This forced mobility has fundamentally changed the status of social classes, but it was quite often joined by senseless sacrifices.²⁴

I can only enter university with this white-collar background, if I apply for physical labour before, they said to me back then. My uncle mentioned a factory near us, saying I might apply for a job there. So I was there for a year as a physical worker, I had to work on small radio parts, before I could continue my education (subject no. 15, natural sciences).

Certain interviewees of mine reported not being accepted to the university of their choice because the political leadership at the time considered them an enemy of the establishment due to their family or heritage.

I was among those least acceptable politically because of my father and my family. So this is what caused issues, not the fact I am a woman. I always reached the maximal scores, but as I said, I was politically not suitable. On top of that, my father (...) could not be put in jail in 1956, but he needed to move to a different city (subject no. 15, natural sciences).

So the issue was again not that the fact I am of a different gender would have meant anything at all (...) it was all political (subject no. 1, social sciences).

There were heaps of quality folks with a degree among my forebears, and children of such had great difficulties getting into a university at the turn of the 50's (subject no. 10, doctor of technical sciences).

I was not a member of KISZ [Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség, Hungarian Young Communist League]. Those intending to continue their studies were 120% KISZ-members in high school. Whoever wasn't could not even be recommended for university by the high school. And I have not become a member due to the Imre Nagy-trial and because my dad was thrown in the clink. When I explained I was not a member of the League due to reasons of conscience, they considered me a clericalist, because who else could have a conscience other than the religious. So they introduced me to other teachers as a reactionary clericalist someone. But I have taken part in all sorts of academic competitions so I could apply eventually (subject no. 25, social sciences).

²³ I. Asztalos-Morell, *op. cit.*, 147–148.

²⁴ T. Valuch, *A magyar művelődés...*, *op. cit.*, 460–490.

Equal rights in statistics, and what lay behind it

The reformation of education practically meant making the primary education mandatory, followed by changing the secondary education. The most important result of the former was the disappearance of the gender-differentiated education typical for the interwar period in Hungary. Decree 6660/1995 of 1945 allowed for women to further their education in law school, whereas Act XII of 1946 allowed for equal conditions for female and male applicants to enroll to universities and colleges. As a consequence, the percentage of women has risen from 19.5% to 41.4% in middle schools in the 1951–52 schoolyear, rising further to 52% by 1959.²⁵ There were significant changes in higher education as well: “the percentage of female doctors as well as lawyers and attorneys has risen from 12.4% and 0% in 1949 to 21.5% and 9.2% in 1960, respectively”²⁶.

By the beginning of 1978, the educational level of working women under 35 was higher than that of men in the same age group. The proportion of women with graduations was 22% in 1962, which has grown to 40% by 1972, and up to 45% in 1978.²⁷ The proportion of women among researchers has risen to 22% by 1970–71, growing to 26% in 1975. The number of female researchers has risen further during the 80's, their proportion reaching 27%, 11% among professors and 16% among research unit leaders.²⁸ Beside gender distribution and the increased number of women, the composition of white-collar society has significantly changed after 1945. It is the prestige of specialist intellectuals that has primarily risen, thus increasing the recognition of technical and economic careers.

It can however be pointed out that the proportion of men in the new political system and restructured white-collar field was still significantly higher on the university departments enjoying higher prestige (such as the technical, economic or law faculties), while the number of women was only higher in places of lesser value.²⁹ So ultimately, even though their number has risen to a huge extent in higher education, this has not resulted in reduction of the present disadvantage of women in the socio-economic field.

The situation has shifted by the 70's insofar as the gender proportion became somewhat even in economic, arts, law, medical faculties and departments of natu-

²⁵ See in M. Schadt, „Feltörekvő dolgozó nő”..., *op. cit.*, 34–36.

²⁶ Data from the Hungarian Statistical Office called KSH (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal) Adatgyűjtemény, quoted by M. Schadt, „Feltörekvő dolgozó nő”..., *op. cit.*, 52.

²⁷ Zs. Ferge, *op. cit.*, 890–893.

²⁸ Cf. P. Faragó, *op. cit.*, 27.

²⁹ M. Schadt, *Ellentmondásos...*, *op. cit.*, 61–75.

ral sciences. This has still not changed the general rule i.e. technical careers belong to men, pedagogy belongs to women.³⁰

In the business world – similar to what can be experienced in the scientific value hierarchy – gender segregation was still apparent. Though it might have seemed based on the economic activity of women that the objective of state socialism with regards to equal opportunities has been fulfilled, the gender disparity has been reproduced in practice.

In her book “Emerging working woman” (*Feltörekvő dolgozó nő*), Mária Schadt pointed out that the women’s ideals created by propaganda (stakhanovite women, etc.) may have increased the number of working women, but they could primarily succeed in feminising workplaces offering bad wages.³¹

There is one more interesting thing, if you look at certain positions, like assistant dean for education, meaning when there is work to do, where the burden is significant, women are immediately found, but if it comes to leadership and acknowledgement, higher wages, men come to the limelight at once (...) (subject no. 9, natural sciences).

The high influx of women onto the labour market has – similarly to higher education – not come with the reduction of social-gender segregation and stratification.

This may have two theoretical reasons. As England sets out, one perspective claims women are streaming into certain professions in high numbers, pushing down salaries, and men abandon the profession. The other explanation claims however that women can only enter into professions men are conceding to – particularly due to disadvantageous revenue possibilities or diminishing social prestige.³²

My superior was a man of course, but he had a lower level of education than me, I already had my doctorate by then. I have gotten a letter from the United States offering the opportunity to take part at a conference. I have never received that letter and ultimately he (my superior) went in my stead. I know this because I have received an invitation from the States the next year as well, and the already opened letter addressed to me was brought to my office by a secretary during a selection by mistake. So I have gotten wind of it, and that they have invited me last year as well. When this came up in the 90’s at some point, my former superior told me “Juli, don’t be mad, this was decreed like this back then, this were the automatics, the self-evident, who the hell would have thought that all that, the entire system will come to an end anytime” (subject no. 15, natural sciences).

³⁰ Zs. Ferge, *op. cit.*, 888.

³¹ M. Schadt, „*Feltörekvő dolgozó nő*...”, *op. cit.*

³² England quoted by B. Nagy, *Karrier női módra*, [in:] K. Lévai, I. Tóth (eds.) *Szerepváltozások. Jelentés a nők és férfiak helyzetéről*, Budapest 1997, 37.

There were absolutely no women among the leaders, cadres of economic-governmental hierarchy in the 50's.³³ This has changed somewhat later, but the proportion has not become significant among the decision-makers in the state sector or with regards to party leadership and upper tier positions.

Examining the statistics of the time, it became clear that the percentage of women among upper and mid-level leaders was 10 to 15% until 1972, after which it grew to 24% in only 5 years. This was however depending on the level and the sector. Thus, as Zsuzsa Ferge points out in her analysis, women were still largely underrepresented in leadership or directorial circles, or in the highest positions of party leadership. In other words, their proportion has only increased in the lower tiers by the 70's.³⁴ Moreover, men have gotten into upper level positions even in professions or organisations where women were overrepresented.

If you look around in this institute (author's note: linguistic institute), you can almost exclusively see women, hardly any male researchers. However, the leaders are men, even here (subject no. 4, social sciences).

Women could only enter the field of politics based on the introduced quota. I need to point out here that the heritage of this forced emancipation is the fact any form of positive discrimination is almost uniformly met with significant revulsion in Hungary due to its state socialist appearance and ideology. Even despite the fact positive discrimination implemented in the 21st century would particularly contribute to the de facto prevalence of constitutional rights. Meaning it would provide assistance to equal chances in case of matching qualifications under certain conditions on the basis of equity, in the science sector for example, in case a woman also deals with family matters.

And what I always say, and said to everyone already, I have reached everything 6 to 8 years later in my profession because I am a woman. And not because it posed an issue – it hadn't, family is important. But it is a fact. The problem is everything has an age limit in science, which is clearly discriminating against women (subject no. 9, natural sciences).

The great disparity typical to all sectors experienced in development became quite apparent not long after the significant changes starting in the late 40's and 50's, i.e. by the 60's, which was most apparent in salary disparities. The allowances of women were significantly lower from that of men even under the same circumstances. The salaries of women hardly reached 80% of their male counterparts in

³³ M. Schadt, „Feltörekvő dolgozó nő” ..., *op. cit.*

³⁴ Zs. Ferge, *op. cit.*

case of identical educational level, position, etc.³⁵ The situation on the labour market has quasi reflected the traditional model of task division in the family as well.³⁶

My boss back then who considered himself a liberal and does so to this very day told me during a friendly conversation that he is not including me in a project because “(...) our colleagues told me your husband has a good salary” (subject no. 16, social sciences).

Family policy – the dual-earner family model, ideology and reality

There was typically no division of household tasks even after the 1950's in Hungary. The surfeit due to household duties and paid employment of women was therefore a source of constant tension and dispute.³⁷ The biggest problem was the dominance of traditional roles within the family, which resulted in the labour related to household duties to be exclusively the burden of women. Women were therefore drawn onto the labour market en masse propagating emancipation to no avail during state socialism, men were nonetheless almost absolutely dismissive with regards to the division of household tasks and they refused to take any part of childcare duties either.

I had two children, and my husband was reluctant to help. He was fulfilling a traditional male role. Meaning children, shopping, all the household chores, cooking, everything was my responsibility. There was no division of labour at all. He has not provided any support when I needed it the most. True, he did not go against my scientific career, but I received no help. Typical male behaviour at the time, so it was very, very tough for me. This was of course to the detriment of my sleep, I was able to read at nights (...) (subject no. 16, social sciences).

I had to settle the conference presentation, and the household for my husband while I was travelling, so that everything is there while I am away (subject no. 23, natural sciences).

Women needed to do well in the household as well, this was especially so in my time. Every preparation related to travels, conferences, as well as the domestic tasks were on my shoulder. I recall sitting on the plane in such a tired state that I did not remember a single thing. I fell asleep as soon as I sat down (subject no. 23, natural sciences).

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ See also M. Neményi, A. Kende, *„Anyák és lányok, „Replika”* 1999, 35(3), 117–141.

³⁷ See also S. Zimmermann, *A társadalmi-nemi (gender-) rezsím és küzdelem a magyar államszocializmusban*, „Eszmélet” 2012, 24(96), 103–131; Zs. Ferge, *op. cit.*, and M. Schadt, *„Feltörekvő dolgozó nő”...*, *op. cit.*

A survey from 1974 with data from sixteen cities of various sizes, as well as a similar survey from 1972 with data collected in villages has pointed out the deeply stereotypical views regarding the most important male and female virtues.³⁸ This was further reinforced by the study of Mária Neményi and Anna Kende created from 42 in-depth interviews. The interviews were made with members of two different generation groups of women (one born in 1945–1946, one born in 1973–1974), the researchers wanted to find answers with regards to how the historical context of Hungarian post-war society affected the male-female relations in personal life as well as the content of the female role. Among others, the study found that despite of fundamental differences, values originating from different social circumstances, or even vastly different life courses (three distinctly different groups were shaped up parallel to the different life courses: the groups of egalitarians, submissives and independents), generalisations, stereotypes regarding men and women, explanations justifying gender differences have been very similar. It has also been stated that a number of similar experiences have presented themselves with regards to the subordinated social role of women in the narratives of both generations.³⁹

Finally, as we could see previously, the socialist family model of “two earners – one family income” was rather “one male earner – one female earner moonlighting as an unpaid housekeeper – one family income” in reality.⁴⁰ True, the Family Act of 1952 made divorces easier, due to women being allowed to initiate the process as well, this only put more strain onto single mothers.

My husband has not supported me that much. I have left him after 12 years of marriage, raised two children alone, both going to primary school back then. But the fact has not meant any leeway in my professional field. So it was very tough. I have a son and a daughter. My daughter used to say “if someone asks who the man in the family is, I usually say it is mostly my mom” (subject no. 27, social sciences).

To summarise, we can state the most significant failing women's policies of the state socialist era had was to draw women onto the labor market en masse, while not reconstructing the male-female relation with regards to domestic roles.⁴¹ It is likely that, compared to lower social classes, traditional male-female roles were – and are – present to a lesser extent in case of white-collar families and an intellectual/scientist husband (homogamy). Moreover, studies related to the topic – e.g. highlighted by Brines, 1994 – showed men take care of even less housekeeping

³⁸ S. Zimmermann, *op. cit.*, 103–131.

³⁹ M. Neményi, A. Kende, *op. cit.*, 117–141.

⁴⁰ S. Zimmermann, *op. cit.*, 107.

⁴¹ J. Acsády, „Megtettük-e azt...”, *op. cit.*

in families of physical workers or where the man is financially dependent on his spouse because they intend to stress their “manliness” and the male social role by strongly resisting the household duties.⁴² In any case, it was apparent that women could mostly achieve success in their scientific career if they received support from their families, division of household tasks and equality in some form.

We had a surrogate grandmother, so we didn't need to carry the children everywhere. So let me say again that I had no problems originating from this, at least not to my knowledge. And I think I can consider myself incredibly lucky from this aspect, because my husband (...) was a father which there are quite few of. I need to add that I never got up for our babies, it was always him who jumped out of the bed and picked the crying baby up. And we had complete equality in terms of sharing the household burden as well (subject no. 1, social sciences).

But this was a great win in my life, my peaceful family, my understanding, loving husband. So I felt no disadvantage in my career for being a woman, and this was incredibly lucky (subject no. 10, technical sciences).

I had an invitation to a conference abroad once. Our child was very little back then, but both my husband and the child came along, for it could not be left without a mother, and I fed the child in the breaks between conferences. And my husband waited with the child outside, taking care of it while I made my presentation, but he is a peer, so he knows these conferences are important (subject no. 22, natural sciences).

Mária Schadt has also pointed out the significant influx of women onto the labour market could only have created equal opportunities on a broader scale between men and women, if taking care of family and tasks related to household are institutionalised, and the state takes over certain responsibilities of childcare.⁴³

Though the number of places in nurseries and kindergarten have significantly increased (tripled) in Hungary between 1950 and 1975, this was not proportional to the extent of women entering the labour market.⁴⁴ Not to say the preschool institutions were quite often inappropriate and of lesser quality due to the high numbers, and they could not take over the burden of nurturing from a large number of women due to the constant supply issues.

⁴² Brines quoted by M. Neményi, J. Takács, *Családfenntartó anyák munka-magánélet harmonizációs kísérletei Magyarországon*, [in:] B. Nagy, Zs. Géring, G. Király (eds.), *Dilemmák és stratégiák a család és munka összehangolásában*, Budapest 2018, 355–380.

⁴³ M. Schadt, „Feltörekvő dolgozó nő”..., *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ See Zs. Aczél, *Üzemi óvodák 1945 és 1975 között*, „Iskolakultúra” 2012, 22(5), 37–55 and M. Schadt, „Feltörekvő dolgozó nő”..., *op. cit.*

The phenomenon was present until the end of this era, and we needn't forget the services could be used by government employees in most cases.⁴⁵ In other words, "the important institutions of state socialism necessary for women and families (nurseries, kindergarten, schools with daycare option) have indeed taken over a part of the burden carried by housewives, all this was however not able to create profound changes in the attitude towards domestic roles."⁴⁶

The state virtually acquitted itself from developing nurseries with the introduction of GYES (Gyermekgondozási segély, Social Childcare Fee) in 1967, which practically put all the material and cultural duties of bearing a child onto women.⁴⁷ The institution of GYES was considered to be unmatched in Europe for a long time. Other states in Central or even Western Europe have introduced a similar benefit only a decade later.

The introduction of this benefit was mandated by several factors. As it is commonly known, after the abortion ban taking effect in 1953, during the so-called Ratkó-era has ringed off, the number of childbirths began to drop drastically after 1957 in Hungary. Massive concern from the central authority was further increased by the fact members of the "baby boom-generation" have begun to be born in this very period in western countries. Beside demographic reasons, certain labour market concerns can also be assumed behind the introduction of GYES, because it might have appeared as a solution to prevent unemployment if a part of women can be drawn out from the labour market.⁴⁸

Zsuzsa Ferge states what became apparent by the 70's could be suspected before that as well, i.e. the significant development in quantity has practically reached its peak in multiple areas.⁴⁹ GYES (which was 40% of the average women's salary) was applied for by 265 thousand women in 1975; this was 11% of women of child-bearing age.⁵⁰ Following this, a new childcare benefit called GYED was introduced in 1985, which was also tied to the former occupation of women. However, neither brought a complete solution regarding the family situation of women.

⁴⁵ Zs. Aczél, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ Neményi–Takács, *op. cit.*, 358–359.

⁴⁷ Cf. Dr. M. Adamik, *A gondoskodás ökonómiája az államszocializmusban. A gyés-diskurzus avagy a szocialista modernizáció válasza a nemek közötti egyenlőség kihívására*, [in:] *Bevezetés a szocialpolitika nem szerinti értelmezésébe – „Gendering Social Policy”*, 154, Budapest 2012, <http://docplayer.hu/28102966-Bevezetes-a-szocialpolitika-nem-szerinti-ertelmezesebe-gendering-social-policy.html> [accessed: 06.15.2020].

⁴⁸ Zs. Makay, *50 éve vezették be a gyermekgondozási segélyt (GYES)*, „Korfa: Népesedési Hírlévlé” 2017, 17(3), 1–4.

⁴⁹ See Zs. Ferge, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ See Zs. Makay, *op.cit.*

Women's ideal, fate of women under state socialism

Women's ideal and the female identity was not completely homogenous during socialism outside the constant traditional male-female role content, but was permanently being shaped by variables such as class – and in relation to it: level of education – financial circumstances, but above all the current official ideology of the state at any given time.

On the basis of the latter, Zsuzsa Ferge has divided the changes of approach regarding women to four distinct periods, starting with 1945. The first (1) period was the time between 1945 and 1965, with the ideal being the working woman having income, the interests of the child were not handled as a priority. The second (2) period engulfed the time after 1965, when the employment – or more specifically, overdriven work – ought not to be hindering the motherly role. Meaning the ideal woman in this period was the good mother, and the interest of children was taking primacy as well (the institution of GYES was introduced in the same period). The third (3) period lasted from 1975 to 1980, and it was typically characterised by accommodating work and family, but a definable ideal has not taken shape. Finally, the fourth (4) period was the one after 1980. The pivotal expectation of this era was for society to acknowledge the social importance of family, children, as well as taking care of the sick and elderly. Ferge concludes the notion of ideal woman previously containing the attribute of “good mother” has thereby been expanded by “the good samaritan”, because caretaking and nursing is naturally a female task, meaning the new woman's ideal became “good mother, good wife, good caretaker”. The motif of self-sacrifice has become even more accentuated than before, not to mention the interests of women have almost completely been subordinated to the interest of children.⁵¹

Ferge considered these constant shifts in values to be dangerous from multiple aspects, because she claims “achieving clearer, unambiguous principles would be more welcome instead of the instability of values or the shift of values spreading currently regarding the women's ideal”.⁵² She thinks basically one of the biggest problems with constantly changing ideals is that one of the devices for solving social issues (like unemployment) is “sacrificing women”, not only unequivocally, but almost as a knee-jerk action, meaning pushing women into the background as workforce and back into family roles again (as seen with GYES in the 70's). The other is if we adjust ourselves to one woman's ideal in any given era, and this ideal changes based on the nature and magnitude of the social issue, this forced adjustment can be of detriment to those denying themselves by the process, and can cause social harm to those who are not able to adjust themselves to this image.⁵³

⁵¹ Zs. Ferge, *op. cit.*, 903.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 906.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

Table 1. Women's ideal in state socialism

Change of women's ideals in state socialism	1 st period 1945 to 1965	2 nd period after 1965	3 rd period 1975 to 1980	4 th period after 1980
Characteristics	– the ideal is the earner, the working woman	– the motherly role of a woman cannot be hindered by employment or overdriven work	– can fundamentally be typified by the reconciliation of work and family	– society needs to acknowledge taking care of family, children, sick and elderly to be an important social interest – the trait of “good samaritan” got added to being a “good mother”
	– interests of children were not considered to be important	– the ideal woman is a good mother, the interests of children are also pivotal	– no definable women's ideal has taken shape	– the new ideal became “good mother, good wife, good caretaker”

Own edited resource, 2019

So if society stresses the domestic role of women in a particular era and considers that to be ideal (“Like, women need to make the most effort around the house” [subject no. 10, doctor of technical sciences]; “taking the child to the nursery belongs to the regular tasks of a woman” [subject no. 23, natural sciences]), a large number of women identify however with their career and if they intend to have children, they may experience internal conflicts or psychological dilemmas. Because if a woman decides to stay at home in such a case, she would contradict herself, but if she chooses the scientific career instead, she might consider herself to be a bad mother. If she decides on both (family and career), she will encounter a disproportionately larger burden as long as there is no social norm, family policy, act of law which would include men into the early period of childcare.

Those who don't have assistance but have a family need to face the challenge of choice, I mean, what do I do now? Who is at the fore? And if there is such, it is a losing situation from then on, because there are no good choices there. Truly, a woman has to decide for family, a mother for her child. But then she abandons her profession (subject no 5, natural sciences).

I need to add that, as I have lived alone, a conflict like that, I mean who will do the cooking or take care of the child, me or my husband, I never had that in my life, but I have meas-

ured it up. This was one hell of a choice for me. But I ambioned to be at least more than a mediocre scholar. So living together, I would not have been able to deal with that. If you like, I have chosen the easier part (subject no. 25, social sciences).

As we can see above in the division of Zsuzsa Ferge based on the shifts in view, the official women's ideal in the 4th period, after 1980 was culminating in the triad of "good wife", "good mother" and "good caretaker". Moreover, the role of "self-sacrificing woman" has appeared much more accentuated than before.

If I had not learnt to work diligently in my younger years, I would indeed be in a tough situation right now (subject no. 10, doctor of technical sciences).

A woman has to be good in multiple roles. She needs to be a good mother, a good partner, she needs to be feminine, she needs to excel in work. A successful man can allow himself to be a bad husband, a bad father, he will not be judged for it the same as a woman would be. This means disproportionately more strain for women (subject no. 17, social sciences).

In relation to this, Ferge adds that because people are universally diverse, the spectrum of socially accepted and acceptable values and views cannot always lead to a narrow, one-sided notion of an ideal woman, a stable model based on choice and diversity would be needed.⁵⁴

Conclusion

Summarising the above, we can establish the emancipation efforts of state socialism were doomed to fail in practice, because the ruling approach in families was still conservative, and the role of the male assisting in household tasks has neither become natural nor typical.

So, the period was characterised from a female perspective by the tension between paid labour and unpaid housekeeping duties. Hungarian women had to endure a disproportionately large amount of suffering due to this and significant structural disadvantages, because gender-based work segregation remained typical, and the leadership positions, as well as positions in professions of higher prestige and bigger salaries were mainly taken by men. Susan Zimmerman asserts most working women in Hungary have experienced paid employment as a possibility of a positive, group-specific identification of sorts nonetheless, because – even if only in a limited manner – it appeared as a prerequisite of a new lifestyle

⁵⁴ *Ibidem.*

and the possibility of personal, social advancement.⁵⁵ At the same time, Schadt pointed out that it was not the need of women for economic independence and a new lifestyle standing behind the dual-earner family model, but more likely the fact wages were kept low during the whole socialist era, and keeping a certain living standard required the gainful employment of both partners in most cases.⁵⁶

As opposed to this, the majority of women belonging to the white-collar class and the political elite were not surprisingly able to utilise the possibilities originating from paid labour, because they have enjoyed certain advantages compared to other women and were also able to hand a part of the caretaking responsibilities to other women. Zimmermann has pointed to this by quoting the study *Two Generations' Perceptions of Femininity in Post-Socialist Hungary* (1999) by Anna Kende and Mária Neményi:

White-collar professionals or experts with a college degree having a career have on occasion achieved more than their husbands, and women whose families had substantial reserves had the opportunity to devolute housekeeping onto other women. Based on this study, the positive three-part identity of these women – enjoying social privileges due to their employment compared to other women – has at the same time been linked by both the traditional family roles and gender equality.⁵⁷

Finally, we can state the real problem of discrimination against women could not be solved by the soviet emancipation model. It turned out that, irrespective of the particular social organisation and its ideology – which had significant impact on social relations and provided opportunities to hundreds of thousands of women in the world outside of family – the biggest disadvantages women needed to endure, the traditional social roles based on gender stereotypes and structural disadvantages have remained unchanged. We can assert that, while emancipation exclusively served the goals of propaganda, and the equality of relationships and in family was actually not realised, this will not even change.

Bibliography

1949. évi XX. törvény – A Magyar Népköztársaság Alkotmánya, <http://www.rev.hu/sulinet45/szerviz/dokument/1949.evi3.html> [accessed: 02.05.2020].

Acsády J., *Államszocializmus – nők – ellenzékiesség*, „Társadalmi Nemek Tudománya Interdiszciplináris eFolyóirat” 2018, 8(1), 1–15, <https://ojs.bibl.u-szeged.hu/index.php/tntef/article/view/33836> [accessed: 07.05.2020].

⁵⁵ S. Zimmermann, *op. cit.*, 87.

⁵⁶ M. Schadt, „Feltörekvő dolgozó nő” ..., *op. cit.*, 128.

⁵⁷ Own translation M. Neményi, A. Kende, quoted by S. Zimmerman, *op. cit.*, 83–84.

- Aczél J., „Megtettük-e azt, amit az eszményeink szerint meg kellett volna, hogy tegyünk?” *Az államszocializmus demokratikus ellenzékének elmaradt nőemancipáció-reflexióiról*, „Socio.hu: Társadalomtudományi Szemle” 2016, 2, 173–197.
- Aczél Zs., *Üzemi óvodák 1945 és 1975 között*, „Iskolakultúra” 2012, 22(5), 37–55.
- Adamik M., *A gondoskodás ökonómiaja az államszocializmusban. A gyēs-diskurzus avagy a szocialista modernizáció válasza a nemek közötti egyenlőség kihívására*, [in:] *Bevezetés a szociálpolitika nem szerinti értelmezésébe – „Gendering Social Policy”*, Budapest 2012, <http://docplayer.hu/28102966-Bevezetes-a-szociálpolitika-nem-szerinti-ertelmezesebe-gendering-social-policy.html> [accessed: 06.15.2020].
- Asztalos-Morell I., *A mérnök: Felszabádított nő vagy pártretorikai fegyverkezésköz a személyi kultusz Magyarországon*, „Társadalmi Nemek Tudománya Interdiszciplináris eFolyóirat” 2018, 2(8), 140–173, http://epa.oszk.hu/03400/03462/00017/pdf/EPA03462_tarsadalmi_2018_02_140-173.pdf [accessed: 06.07.2020].
- Faragó P., *Nők a tudományban. A tudós nők helyzete Magyarországon a 20. században*, [in:] M. Balogh, S. Nagy Katalin (eds.), *Asszonyorsok a 20. században*, Budapest 2000, 25–33.
- Ferge Zs., *Változik-e manapság a nők helyzete Magyarországon?*, „Létünk” 1982, 5, 883–907.
- Kövér G., Gyáni G., *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a reformkortól a második világháborúig*, Budapest 2006.
- Lamm V., Nagy B., 2019 ismét a „nők éve” az Akadémián. *Törekvések a nők tudományos pályafutásának támogatására*, „Magyar Tudomány” 2019, 180(11), 1649–1665.
- Makay Zs., *50 éve vezették be a gyermekgondozási segélyt (GYES)*, „Korfa: Népesedési Hírlevél” 2017, 17(3), 1–4.
- Nagy B., *Karrier női módra*, [in:] K. Lévai, I. Tóth (eds.) *Szerepváltozások. Jelentés a nők és férfiak helyzetéről*, Budapest 1997, 37.
- Neményi M., *Család és családpolitika*, „Szociológiai Szemle” 2003, 1, 3–27.
- Neményi M., Kende A., *Anyák és lányok*, „Replika” 1999, 35(3), 117–141.
- Neményi M., Takács J., *Családfenntartó anyák munka-magánélet harmonizációs kísérletei Magyarországon*, [in:] B. Nagy, Zs. Géring, G. Király (eds.), *Dilemmák és stratégiák a család és munka összehangolásában*, Budapest 2018, 355–380.
- Schadt M., *Ellentmondásos szerepvárások, nők az államszocializmusban*, „Acta Sociologica” 2005, 1, 61–75.
- Schadt M., *„Feltörekvő dolgozó nő” – Nők az ötvenes években*, Pécs 2003.
- Valuch T., *A magyar művelődés 1948 után*, [in:] L. Kósa (ed.), *Magyar művelődéstörténet*, Budapest 1998.
- Valuch T., *Magyar hétköznapok. Fejezetek a mindennapi élet történetéből a második világháborútól az ezredfordulóig*, Budapest 2013.
- Valuch T., *„Ne szólj szám...”*. *A politikai részvétel és a politikai aktivitás néhány sajátossága az ezredforduló Magyarországon*, „Metszetek: Társadalomtudományi Folyóirat” 2013, 2–3.
- Zimmermann S., *A társadalmi-nemi (gender-) rezsim és küzdelem a magyar államszocializmusban*, „Eszmélet” 2012, 24(96), 103–131.